

THE 12
Practice of Discipline,
OR

Some DIRECTIONS for the right Managing of

Ecclesiastick Discipline.

In way of ESSAY:

Designed more specially for the Information and Use of

RULING ELDERS.

By an Elder of the Church of Scotland.

1 Cor. 14. 40. Let all things be done Decently and in Order.

The Eccles. Discipl. of the Reformed Church in France, Cap. 3. The Office and Duty of the Elders, is to be watchful over the Flock together with the Pastors, and to see the People gathered, to make Report of the Scandals and Faults, to take knowledge and judge thereof with the Pastors, and to take care of good Order and Government of the Church.

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THE Practice of Discipline.

THE *Common-Wealth of Israel* can neither subsist nor flourish without *Discipline*, no more than a Kingdom without Laws, a City without Government, an Army without *Martial Tactics*, or a Garden without a Hedge or Wall: For where there is no Established Order, Confusion and Desolation must needs follow; And People will readily make their own Lusts, their Laws, and will observe no other Discipline, than what their irregular Passions, may dictate and prompt them to follow: The very light of Nature sufficiently instructs the necessity of *Rule and Order* for cementing and establishing Society; and as Discipline is requisite, so it may be most *useful and profitable*, if managed with due Discretion, Prudence and Equity: Unto this our purpose the Apostle prescribes a comprehensive General, 1 Cor. 14. 40. *Let all things be done decently and in Order.*

This is the Province we here undertake, in way of Essay, to offer some Directions for the regular Exercise, and righteous Application of *Church Discipline*, in the City and House of God: I am not without suspicion of being reckoned presumptuous and arrogant, in giving Rules and Advices to Church-Officers, not doubting but the most part of Ministers of any standing and Experience, do understand these things better than I can pretend to, but as to them I intend no more, saving only to put them in remembrance: Yet there may be some less experienced *Ruling Elders*, to whom haply these Directions may not be useless.

Now in Prosecution of our Design, we humbly offer some *Directions*, to these who are Members constituent of Church Judicatories, how they should discharge themselves; and also some Advices to these who may be obnoxious unto, or actually are under Church Processes and Censures.

As to the first Point take these *Directions*.

1. *Direct.* Study to attain a competent Stock of Understanding in matters of Discipline: Whatever Art or Profession any Man espouses or practises, it is most needful and agreeable, that he be well insighted and learned in the Principles, Rules and Practiques thereof: That in his Applications he may proceed the more *knowingly and solidly*, particularly in matters of Justice and Judgement: Every pious Man is not a prudent Man, nor every serious Man intelligent and solid: Very honest, well meaning Persons may err in Judgement, and pervert Righteousness, through lack of Knowledge, which may produce many dangerous and ill Effects, 1 Kings 3. 11. *Eph.* 1. 13.

2. *Direct.* Admit not Delations to come the length of publick Process, either for *private Faults or common Infirmities*, this were to make Scandals where there are none, specially when represented with a disallowable degree of Heat and Aggravation, which some passionate or prejudicat persons may indulge themselves unto; such *Cynical* Spirits should rather be reprehended, than encouraged, and should be gravely admonished both to consider Christs Rule, and their own Hearts, *Matth.* 18. 16, 17. *Gal.* 6. 1. If the Method and Steps of Procedure in *private Rebukes* were conscientiously observed, I am confident it might stop and prevent many fashious and frivolous Delations: And if every man would candidly reflect on his own Humours and Infirmities; [*for in many things we offend all, Jam.* 3. 2.] I dar say we would treat others with more *Tenderness, Charity and Forbearance*, than many do: It is an excellent saying of

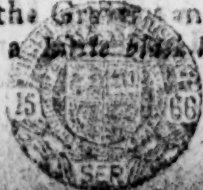
of a Heathen; *Senec. Trag. Agam. L. 265. Desidera veniam facile, cui venia est opus*: And it is a more excellent Saying of our Saviours, *Mat. 7. 12. All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them*; for this is the Law and the Prophets: I cannot pass what *Zepporus* saith, *Discipl. Eccl. L. 1. C. 16. What Faults of our Neighbours we know, whether we be privat persons, or Ministers, or Elders, we should not prosecute them beyond the Limits which Christ hath set to us, neither should we imprudently blaze abroad, or bring above-board our Neighbours Imperfections or Infirmities, even tho they be plain Faults, but if this be done by an Elder, he is not without Fault.*

3. *Direct.* Be *deliberat and Cautious* in your judicial Procedures, be not too credulous of Whispers and Hear-says; Let not uncertain Information be the matter of Delation, far less of Condemnation: And tho perhaps they be reputed Godly-Folk who are the Reporters and Informers, yet try ere ye trust; for even good Folk may sometimes be guilty of Back-biting and Reproaching, as well as others, and also may labour under the ill Disease of the Flux of the Tongue; Ye have not access to know all the sinister Motives, and secret Reasons that may prompt persons to Slanders and Calumnies: Therefore I repeat, be *deliberat and cautious*, specially ere ye come the length of Censure or Sentence; for they who too soon and forwardly come to pass their Interlocutors or Decrets, may also come soon to repent, and wish out of time, that they had access to recognise or revoke their immature Sentences: It was a sound Christian Check from an unchristian Clerk, *Acts 19. 36. Ye ought to do nothing rashly*. We cannot but insert here what heathen *Seneca* says, it hath such a Christian Air; We should not too soon credit every thing narrated; many speak falsely, with a design to deceive; many speak amiss, because they are deceived; another carries Favour by Calumnies, and feigns a Fault that he may seem to lament it; again, another is of such a mischievous Temper, that he does what he can, to put Enmity among Friends, &c. *Sen. de Ira. L. 2. C. 29.*

4. *Direct.* Be *impartial in Judgement*; abandon from your Minds all byassing Motives from external Considerations either of persons, or parties: *Great Persons* should not be passed over or spared, no more than the *Vulgar*, nor eminent *Professors*, more than the notoriously *Profane*; mind you act in His Name and Stead with whom there is no respect of persons, *2 Chr. 19. 7.* It is a Criminal Perversion of Justice, to be swayed in Judgement by *Faith or Favour*; *Friend, Kin and Allay*, should not tempt us to alloy or corrupt Righteousness: It is a heavy Imputation upon Judges, to have the common Saying verified by their Administrations; *Shew me the Man, and I will shew you the Law*: When People observe palpable *Partiality* in Judges, it mars the success and weight of Censures, and endangers the censured to become *disobedient*.

5. *Direct.* Be *Discreet and Moderat* in all your Administrations, both with respect to the *Quality* of Persons, and the *Quantity* of Punishment: Certainly a Wise and discreet Consideration is to be had of the different Qualities and Circumstances of Persons, in the way of managing Rebukes and Censures; Magistrates and Superiors are to be respected otherways than these of Inferior Rank: Yet let not this be misconstrued as contradictory to what was said above, for we mean not as to the Substance of the Duty, as if it were to be superceded altogether towards great Persons, and that Church Censures should be executed only against the meaner sort; But we understand mainly, as to the *Manner* of Procedure: And again, as to the *Quantity* of Punishment, a righteous proportion is to be kept, agreeably to the nature and degrees of Offences; That neither great Faults be too lightly corrected, nor smaller ones too heavily or rigidly punished; lest by intemperat *Severity*, it be found, that *Summum Jus is Summa Injuria*: Saith the Emperor *Justin. L. 1. C. de Jud. It is our pleasure that in all things, a greater regard be had to Equity, than to strict Law*. It is an Imputation on *Draco* the *Athenian Legislator*, that in his Constitutions, he made all Faults alike *Capital*, and punishable by death; The stealing of Coals, or *Fruit*, was death, as well as Murder, Incest, &c. On which account it is become proverbial. *Draconical Laws*, i. e. *Sanguinarie*, too rigid Laws: Which puts me in mind of a pleasant Passage. I have read of worthy *Paul Bayns*, the Writer of the Preface to his *Discassons Tryal*, says, That Mr. Bayns presenting himself before Archbishop *Bancroft*, at the first Salutation, the *Gravity* and *Severity* of the Archbishop, led him sharply to rebuke the good Man, for a *little black Work*, which was upon the edges of his

Cuffs



Cuffs; and he asked him, how he durst come before him with such Cuffs, telling him very Bishop-like, that it were a good turn to lay him by the heels, for so doing.

6. *Direct.* Mingle not your own Spirit in the Infliction of Spiritual Censures: Eph: 4. 31. Let all bitterness and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice: *Ubi res transit in affectum, parit Judicium*: It is most unsuitable, that they who censure the Faults of others, should by their passionat and indiscreet way of Censuring, at the same time be Faulters themselves; and rare it is that *fierce fierce* Rebukes do any good, for the *wrath of Man worketh not the Righteousness of GOD*, James 1. 20. It is a fine verse of Claudians, *Quia ratio non ira movet, Dis proximus ille est*. And no less an excellent saying of Seneca "Never let Reason assume unto its assistance rash and impetuous Passions, which is far from adding any Weight or Authority to it, Sen: de Ira. L. 1. C. 9. See then that ye studie Gravity of Carriage, and Meekness of Spirit, in your Managements, according to the Apostolick Canon: Gal: 6. 1. Manage your Business with more Compassion, than Passion; and with more Sympathie, than Antipathie: At least, let your Antipathie and Zeal, strike more against the Crimes of the persons, than the persons Criminal, Revel: 2. 6. That it may convincingly appear it is their real Good and Edification, ye design, and to reclaim them from the evil of their ways, which Candor and Calmness will more probably compass, than Craft, or Roughness.

7. *Direct.* As Meekness, Moderation, and Prudence, are requisite Ingredients in the Exercise of Discipline: So Church Officers, considering whom they represent, 1 Cor: 5. 20. And that they are acting in the name and authority of their great Lord and Master, 2 Chron: 19. 6. They should be Brisk, Bold, and Zealous: They may sometimes have to do with rude rugged persons, Neither fearing GOD, nor regarding Man, who seek to disparage and disgrace Church Discipline: Towards such it becomes the Ambassadors of the LORD to carry Courageously, being bold as a Lion, Prov: 28. 1. and not to fear the face of Man: Ezek: 3. 7, 8, 9. They should not be cowed or cowardized by the Insults of unreasonable men, but stoutly oppose their impieties, listening to their Mighty and Faithful Master, that he will help, Second, and Patronize them, in their dutiful performance of what he calls them to. It is storied of our famous John Knox, that the Earl of Morton said of him when he was interred: Here lyes a Man that never feared the face of Man, he was often threatened with Dagge and Dagger, yet hath he ended his days in Peace and Honour. I think it not amiss here to suggest, That the authorized Ambassadors of King JESUS, should also take care, not to prostitute their Sacred Authority, to the ignorant conceits, and impotent [tho' sometimes imperious] humours of the Populace; a popular Supremacie, is the most odious, pernicious, and most unaccountable of all others, the which peccant humour, too predominant with some, we wish the Ministers of Christ may use means, rather to purge out, than to foment. Hence Calamy in the Abbrgement of Baxter's Life page 210. gives this as a part of the Character of Doctor Manton; He was no Fomentor of Faction, but Studious of the publick Tranquillity: His generous constancie of Mind, in resisting the current of popular Humour, declared his Loyalty to his Divine Master. I refuse not but all gentle, tender, and prudent Methods should be taken, to recover and reclaim them, from the Errors of their ways, but when these are reproachfully contemned by their arrogant and obstinat misdemeanors, as they should with all meekness be instructed of their Stational Duties, so with a becoming Boldness they should be discharged to meddle with matters too high for them, and authoritatively enjoined to keep within their proper Sphere, lest by irregular Eccentric Morions, they give the Ark of GOD a wrong touch: Christ's Officers, as it well becomes their Character, should with all Wisdom, and Authority, make unruly and ignorant people understand themselves, that they are the Ruled and Watched-over, and are obliged in Conscience to be Obedient and subject to their Church guides and Governours, Heb: 13. 17.

8. *Direct.* Be Just and Righteous in your Decisions, Deut. 1. 16. Judge Righteously and according to Law, as it is Eph: 6. 15. In all your Administrations, give every body Fair and full Justice, whether in Condemning or Absolving, Deut: 25. 1. In every point let Parties Litigant or accused, get a fair Hearing, what they have to say in their own Apologie and Defence, and full access in all the Steps of Law and Form; to clear themselves as much as they can, Acts 25. 15, 16. John 7. 51. Pass not Sentence upon scrimp, lame, or dubious probation: A *Declina* of libile Witnesses *ad idem*, is the *minimum quod sit*, of Legal Evidence, Deut: 19. 15. We say they must be

be habile Witnesses, neither *ultraneous*, *infamous*, nor *such* as the Partie accused can instruct a Legal or Relevant Exception against; And he is to be *Legally Cited* and sisted in Judgement for this effect, ere Witnesses be admitted to Oath or Deposition: Pray let matters be so equally managed, as there may be no just cause of Complaint. But again, let me advertise *Ecclesiastical Judges*, not to stretch Justice to the utmost Line and Point of Severity; Remember the Emperor's saying which we cited before, It is our pleasure, that in all things a greater regard be had to Equity, than to strict Law. Let there be a fit and reasonable Temper kept betwixt rigid Severity, and too large Lenity: Though we humbly think, specially in matters of Scandal and Infamie, that [*Salvo Jure Cujuslibet, & Salva Conscientia*] there should be a Propension, rather to the extreme of Mercy, than of Justice, and a wish and desire that persons accused may rather be found Innocent, than guilty. It is an affecting saying of James 2. 13. *He shall have Judgement without Mercy, that hath shewed no Mercy*, and Mercy rejoiceth against Judgement.

9. *Direct.* Proceed orderly and gradually in the infliction of Spiritual Censures, exercising *Patience*, in your Advances step by step, trying first what the *lesser degrees of Censure* may produce with Offenders, in order to convincing and gaining them, before you come to *Higher*; There should be frequent privat traveling and dealing with Parties, to inform them of the nature and aggravations of their Faults, if they seem to be ignorant or inadvertant: Also, *Admonitions*, with certification of higher Censures should be applyed, previous to the actual infliction of these, *viz.* either of the *lesser or greater Excommunication*; which should not be executed in ordinar, till after manifest Impenitencie, and the contumacious Contempt of *Admonitions* and gentle Endeavours: Hence the *Confession of Faith*, Cap. 30. §. 4. speaking of publick Church-Censures, condescends upon the different Species and Kinds of them, and that in the due order as they are to be executed: *The Officers of the Church* [says the Confession] *are to proceed by Admonition, suspension from the Sacrament of the LORD's Supper for a Season, and by Excommunication, &c.*

10. *Direct.* Be not superficial but diligent in this part of your Work: *Rom: 12. 7, 8.* Church Officers should make Conscience of attending Church-judicatories, being as proper and certain Duty in its own time and place, as Preaching or Praying; For the manifest neglect of which Duty, *Spiritual Censures*, by grave Rebukes, Admonitions, &c. should be applyed: And further, see that in your Disciplinary Work, you quickly dispatch Business, with as much Expedition as may be, not vexing and tormenting People with needless shifts and Dilators: For we think that unnecessary delaying to do Justice, is plain Unjustice: A very Heathen King could say, *Let Judgement be executed speedily*, *Ezr: 7. 26.*

11. *Direct.* See ye be very *Blameless and Circumspect* in your own Life and Conversation: many Eyes are upon the Manners of these who are Censors of the Manners of others; and if any thing fall out Offensive and Culpable in their Practices, it will be exposed in folio, and Scanned to the full: They may expect to have such like Retortions laid in their Dish, when they attempt the Censuring of others; *Physician. heal thy self: Friend, begin at home: Brother, first cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye, then, &c.* Church-men of all others should be so unblameable in their Morals, as to be able to say with *Lancelotus*: in fin. *Hist. Mus. Nec momentum metuo, nec minimum*: and sure there is nothing can more enervate the Force and Authority of just Rebukes, than when they who Censure are rebukeable for manifest Immoralities: Hence the Apostle once and again describing the Qualifications of a right Bishop, says, a Bishop *must be blameless*, *2 Tim. 3. 2. Tit. 1. 7.*

12. *Direct.* Use your utmost power and prudence to keep the People in your respective Charges, under good Order and Discipline, specially with respect to attendance on the Pastoral performances of their own Ministers: For certainly there is a real and fixed Relation betwixt Pastor and People, whence arises a mutual Obligation, binding Ministers on the one hand, carefully to Inspect, Feed, and Rule the People of their definite Charge, and also the People are bound on the other hand to love, respect, obey, and submit to their own Pastors, in their faithful Administration of all Gospel-Ordinances: It cannot be told, what Confusions, Offences and Enormities may fall out upon indiscreet Peoples following their own desultorie Spirits, itching Ears, and intemperat Humours, which on all occasions Ministers and Elders should conscientiously

tionously endeavour, to Curb, Discourage and Reform ; and hence the Wisdom of the General Assembly has thought fit to make an expresse Act, shewing their Dislike of such Disorderly Practices, and in a most solemn way have Prohibited the same, with Certification of Church-Censures against both Ministers and People, who have accession to the Creating, fomenting, or continuing the like Offensive Irregularities. See Act Assen. 1647. Aug. 24. p. 350.

13. Direct. See ye be very single and upright in the Exercise of Church Discipline : while ye pretend to be purging out the Leaven of Scandalous and infectious Sinners ; take heed that at the same time there be not Fermenting in your own Bosoms, the Leaven of Hypocrisy, hatred, malice, envy, pride, wrath, revenge, pique, or prejudice : If from any of these, or the like base byasses, ye be selfishly swayed to pass Censures upon others, though your Sentences upon the Matter be Just, yet ye shall not pass without GOD'S just Reproof.

14. Direct. Be much and fervent in Prayers and Supplications to GOD, that he may give you Light, Counsel and Conduct in all your Managements of this kind : also pray that He may back with His Effectual and Powerful Blessing your Administrations of this His own Ordinance, upon all occasions occurrent ; that so Ecclesiastick Discipline in the Dispensation of it, may attain its true Ends : Now we shall Conclude our Directions with Jehoshaphat's Recommendation to Judges, 2 Chr. 19. 6. Take heed what ye do, for ye judge not for Man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the Judgement.

The Second Point proposed, is to give a few ADVICES to these who are under Church Process or Censure.

1. Advice, Study to know, and to be convinced that Church Discipline is a Sacred Ordinance Instituted by CHRIST JESUS, bearing the Stamp of the same Divine Authority, with other unquestionable Gospel-Ordinances : and that this Ordinance is not to be used or refused, at the Arbitriment of the Church, as if it were a humane Devise : No, for CHRIST the Head of the Church, by the Tradition of the Keys of the Kingdom to his Apostles, and their Successors to the Worlds end, hath doted and endowed them with Power and Authority, to exercise Discipline, and inflict Spiritual Censures : Mat. 16: 19. Joh. 20. 22, 23. The Example and Practice of the Apostles, proves this likewise very plainly : 1 Cor. 5. 4, 5, 11. Revel. 2. 14, 15, 20. And further, it is well known, that in the Primitive Times of the Church after the Apostles days, Ecclesiastick Discipline was in great Vigour and Veneration, and universally used : and so long as there is a Church, Spiritual Discipline should be regarded and Submitted to.

2. Adv. When ye are Delated and Sifted before Judicatories, and Charged with Scandalous Transgressions, upon pregnant Presumptions of Guilt, which the Judicatorie can not win by, to Examine and Prosecute ; do not fallily prevaricate, nor impudently deny the Truth whereof thou art convinced in thine own Conscience : whereby thou wilt creat Trouble, both to Judicatories, and thy self, and multiply Additional Guilt upon thine own Head : but rather give Glory to GOD by timeous Confession, Josh. 7. 19. And lay thy self open to Heavens Mercy : For he that covereth his sins shall not prosper ; but whose confesseth and forsaketh them, shall have mercy, Prov. 28. 13. Be ye not like many ill Men, who when Deprehended in Wickedness, and thereupon Challenged, do fondly fancie, that by putting on a brazen Face, and braving it out with stout and constant Denyals, they may thus elude the reach of Justice, which is plainly making Lyes their Refuge, and under Falsehood seeking to hide themselves, 1 Joh. 28. 15. Alas that Men should Plague themselves into Security and Obduration, upon the hopes of Escaping for lack of Legal Probation, when they have an All-seeing GOD, the Searcher of Hearts to do with, 1 Sam. 16. 7. The LORD seeth not as Man seeth, for Man looketh on the outward Appearance, but the LORD looketh on the Heart.

3. Adv. Be not Angry, nor Revengful against Ministers or Elders, for requiring you to Satisfy Church Discipline : there are some Cross-grained, froward Persons, when prosecuted for their Offences, they presently flee into a Flame, and huffily scorn all Reproofs, and will by no means be induced to Subject to the Laudable Order of the Church, yea they hate him

who rebuketh in the gate, Amos 5. 10. There be others of so Malicious ill Natures, that *utroque modo*, by Lies, Calumnies, Recriminations, &c. They seek to wrack their Revengful Humour on Church-Officers; Hence it is storied of *Cato Censorius*, that because of his Fidelity, and strictness in the Discharge of his *Censorial Office*; he created to himself many Enemies, who out of Impotent Malice and Revenge Accused him Four score several Times for Forged Faults, but he was as often Absolv'd, and declared Innocent to his great Honour, and their great Shame and Confusion who Accused him.

4. *Adv.* Entertain not any such sinister Imagination of Ministers or Elders, as that their design in challenging you for your Faults, is to *affront and Expose* you, this may be an uncharitable Mistake: pray what pleasure can they have to rake in the Dung-hill of Mens foul some Manners and Abominations? Or what profit can they propose in doing what may Dash or Vex Men, and consequently, create to themselves Ill-will and Unfriends, let them Manage never so cannily and cautiously; but being Servants under Trust, they are concerned to *exonerate* their Consciences in the faithful Discharge of their Dutie, as being *accountable* to their LORD and Master, *Hebr. 13. 17.* If it were not this way to have inward Quiet and Peace towards GOD, sure Ministers love outward Peace and Quiet als well as their Neighbours: Moreover their Design is so far from your injurious Alledgeance, to Affront you, that it is to *reclaim* you, and pluck you as Brands out of the Fire: Paul tells us, *1st the Exercise of Spiritual Power by Discipline, is for Edification, and not for Destruction. 2nd 10. 8. 13. 16.* Except it be as the same Apostle says, *1 cor. 5. 5.* For the *Destruction* of *Wick*, that the Spirit may be Saved, in the Day of the LORD JESUS, i. e. for *promoving* your Souls Welfare for ever, and certainly it is neither Right nor Reasonable to be Angrie at them for this, which is so good an Office, that ye should thank them for their Pains, and look upon them as your Truest Friends, *Prov. 27. 5, 6.*

5. *Adv.* Content not your selves with the *publick profession of Repentance*, without *ard* contrition and Humiliation: Some may very plausibly go the Round of all the usual steps of publick Appearances, according to the common Order of the Church, who yet are *S*gers to sincere, deep Repentance towards GOD; it is a Thing too nortour, and much to be Lamented, and also very straitning to Ministers, that the most part of publick Repentances, are but *show* and *mock work*: So that in stead of giving Satisfaction, or removing Scandal thereby, new Offence is given [and it is a Thing much wished by some, that there were a way concerted and Authorized, for Remeeding and Reforming this manifest Abuse] Therefore see you be upright with GOD, study serious Repentance at the Heart, and true Reformation of Life: It is your after Walk and Way of Living, will best Document the Hypocrisie or Reality of your Repentance: Moreover, take good Heed that after you are Absolved from Church Censures, you do not *Relapse* into the same kind of Faults for which you have been Rebuked, or any other Scandals: Keep out of ill Company; Watch and Pray that ye enter not into Temptation.



F I N I S

